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SOCIETY AND THE GREAT WAR

AFTER many years of tranquillity the Great War naturally came as a stunning blow to the surviving Victorians of Mayfair, most of whom were people who had never dreamt that it would be possible for an enemy to assail London.

Some of the old school, indeed, regarded the attacks of Zeppelins and aeroplanes mainly as an unwarrantable piece of impertinence with which the proper authorities should effectually deal, and when they heard the bombs fall, felt inclined to send out and call a policeman, as in more peaceful days they had been wont to do in order to banish unpleasant noises made by street singers and German bands.

Now, however, they found themselves confronted by a new and particularly unpleasant development of the latter nuisance which it was not so easy to suppress, and during the earlier part of the great struggle the poor old ladies and gentlemen were compelled to rely mainly upon the darkness and composure which the leading spirit of the Government of that day declared was the proper method of meeting such attacks.

Some aristocratic residents in the West End were rather inclined to regard the whole thing merely as another manifestation of the vulgarity inseparable from modern ways, and, treating the raids much as

they might the impertinence of some gutter-snipe, altogether ignored them by going quietly to bed.

To a number of stalwarts of the old school the war seemed almost incomprehensible, and only to be accounted for by the fact that Queen Victoria was no longer alive.

They remembered the wars of the Great Queen's reign, which had always been conducted more or less in a decent way.

First had come the departure of a few thousand troops, accompanied by Press congratulations on the efficiency of the military authorities in having got such a force together. Accounts of the journey out, the disembarkation and landing having appeared in the Press, news of a great and decisive battle had in almost every instance not been long in reaching England.

The casualties in such campaigns as a rule had been slight and the issue, fitly followed by the distribution of honours to the right sort of people, invariably successful.

Tel-el-Kebir and Omdurman were crushing victories purchased at comparatively small cost.

The Boer War, which had clouded the last days of Queen Victoria, had for a certain time, it was true, been unpleasant, but at its worst it had never been anything like as bad as this barbarous struggle with the horrid Germans !

It was tragic enough to hear of so many fine young men getting killed without being exposed to the aerial attacks of low foreigners who went sailing about in the air over Piccadilly and Mayfair for all the world as if England belonged to them !

The whole thing seemed outrageous ! Meanwhile the new generation, just grown up, showed a tenacity and bravery beyond all praise. The boys all tried their hardest to get to the front, while the girls, a

number of whom would have liked to have fought with their brothers or lovers, took up all sorts of unpleasant occupations from which their predecessors of a past age would have recoiled.

Several hundred years, indeed, seemed to have elapsed since the days pictured by John Leech, when young ladies carried scent bottles and fainted at the sight of a mouse !

Old people looked at the youthful amazons striding about the streets or driving cars, while their thoughts wandered back to the sixties, when a young lady could not walk out unattended, go in a cab or ride in the park alone. Her amusements and literature had then been severely censored, newspapers and books being often read through by parents before she was allowed to have access to them. And here were mere girls in their 'teens rushing about in company with hordes of young men, to whom they had not even been introduced !

All things considered, the winning of the war was a marvellous achievement.

England, as Germany well knew, was quite unprepared for a great military adventure, and no one could have dreamt that she would improvise such a vast and efficient army.

Then there were the politicians and the Hidden Hand which some of them seemed rather inclined to grasp.

"What would happen supposing we lost the war ?" somewhat hesitatingly inquired in 1915 one of these gentlemen occupying a high position of a distinguished general now unhappily dead. Leaning forward, a sardonic grin upon his weather-beaten countenance, the general tapped his questioner genially on the knee. "They'd hang you," said he—a retort which stopped further speculations.

Quite unconsciously, of course, Bismarck, by the

success of his pet schemes for the unification of Germany, brought about that country's downfall. Not that this would have occurred if more Chancellors like Bismarck had been available, but they were not, and the guidance of the ship of State fell into hands too feeble to steer a straight and satisfactory course.

The attitude of the English towards Germany had always been friendly, visitors from the Fatherland being well received by all classes of the population.

In the earlier part of the nineteenth century, it is true, Germans in England were comparatively rare, and very few English people ever thought of learning their language.

When, however, Queen Victoria had been married to the Prince Consort, German literature came into fashion, and after the war of 1870 music, art, finance, and commerce began to be affected by the influence of German culture and resource.

As time went on, England became a happy hunting ground for adventurous Teutons, who found there better chances of speedy prosperity than in their own country. In the eighties the invasion from the Fatherland, which substituted German clerks, merchants and tradesmen for English ones, was in full swing. In 1885 it was calculated there were some 150,000 Germans in London, but the number increased very largely in after years, and must have amounted to a considerable figure just before the outbreak of the Great War, when invaders from the Fatherland were elbowing Englishmen aside in all directions, underselling them in trade and in the humbler ranks of industry, while competing with them upon terms on which the latter with their higher standard of life found it difficult not to be beaten.

Bismarck appears to have had no particular dislike

for the English, but in his day, when Queen Victoria was alive, the points of friction between his country and England were comparatively insignificant.

What, however, the Great Chancellor did not like was any attempt on the part of his compatriots to import English Parliamentary institutions into Germany, while strenuously opposing any innovations tending towards Anglicizing its people.

This being so, it is scarcely strange that he looked upon the Empress Frederick with a certain amount of suspicion.

The Iron Chancellor, it has been said, was not an enthusiastic admirer of Gladstone, did not understand or approve the latter's action as to Home Rule, and was inclined to minimize his attainments as a practical politician. He admitted, however, that he was a great orator, but in conversation more than once hinted that the Grand Old Man, besides being absurdly humanitarian, was apt to be carried away by his own oratory.

Acts, not words, were what Bismarck liked; also he was a bitter enemy to political sentimentalism, a failing of which he himself had never been accused.

Even in 1913 the idea of a war with Germany seemed very remote.

The Germans, of course, kept up an enormous army, but that, it was understood, was for the gratification of an Emperor who was fond of presiding at great field days and, after they were over, reading lectures to Colonels and Generals on the art of war and the correct way to master the science of tactics.

A terrible martinet, he was, as some one said, a terror to his own soldiers in peace-time whatever he might prove to be to a foe!

His grandfather, the old Emperor William, had been much more apathetic about military matters, it having

been his practice to leave the conduct of warlike manœuvres in the hands of the staff.

It was a new thing for a German Emperor personally to make a minute inspection of his regiments and attempt to master every detail of the immense military machine which had been so laboriously built up.

When in his prime, William II was in the saddle every morning at six, rode from Potsdam sixteen miles into Berlin, reaching the Tempelhof Parade Ground about eight. Only after seven or eight hours on horseback, drilling and manœuvring, did he usually attend to affairs of State, which he appeared to regard merely as a diversion from the serious business of his life, which was the Army.

Though the Kaiser during his visits to this country appears to have made an effort to be genial, he occasionally made remarks which were neither happy nor in good taste.

The late Lady Paget, who was one of the most popular figures in London Society, having sustained terrible injuries in a lift accident, went abroad to be treated by a great German surgeon, with the result that the latter eventually succeeded in getting a badly broken leg into such a condition that with the help of a stick she was able to walk.

Some time later, she told me, the Kaiser, who knew this, seeing Lady Paget at a party in London, shouted to her—

“Hullo, Lady Paget! How is your new leg ‘made in Germany’ getting on?”

Not unnaturally perhaps, both on the Continent and in England, a number of people had expected the German Empire to go to pieces directly Bismarck had been discarded by the young Emperor. The famous cartoon in “Punch,” “Dropping the Pilot,” summed up the situation in an admirable fashion. Without

the Pilot many feared that the ship of Germany would go on the rocks, and though for some years it steered a fairly good, if bold, course, that is exactly where it eventually landed.

Up to his dismissal in 1890, the Chancellor had adroitly managed to strengthen the position of the throne. Though at times he had appeared to make concessions to the rising tide of democracy, he had in reality raised defences likely to make the Imperial throne even more secure than it had been in the past.

It was well said that the political situation in Germany as arranged by Bismarck might have been compared to a man driving a team of horses, which his child, allowed to place a finger on the reins, liked to think it was guiding; the man represented the Emperor and the child a proletariat which had no real power.

Bismarck, though he passed a number of measures, disliked Radical Reforms. He left the House of Hohenzollern stronger than he had found it, and consolidated the ascendancy of Prussia with an ultimate result which, astute and clever as he was, he could never have foreseen.

Of course while Queen Victoria was alive a war between England and Germany was almost unthinkable, for a man does not make war upon his grandmother any more than he marries her.

Also during the great Queen's reign the ties between the English and German Courts remained strong.

The Victorians had witnessed the marriage of their Princess Royal with the heir to the German Crown, and to many of them the fierce struggle between the two great nations appeared an unnatural thing.

Few of the older ones lived to see the end of the Great War. One of the last was Lady Georgiana Peel, a daughter of Lord John Russell, who had been a

favourite of Queen Victoria in her childhood and had been present at the first investiture of the Victoria Cross with which the Queen personally decorated a number of Crimean heroes in Hyde Park.

The recollections of this lady went back to the Chartist riots of 1848, when, according to her, the members of the Foreign Office improvised defences out of piles of Blue books in case of any attack by the mob.

Lady Georgiana was eighty-six at the time of her death, which occurred at her home in Hampton Court Palace, where another clever Victorian lady—the widow of Lord Wolseley—also had her abode.

It is curious to reflect that not very many years ago people were alive who had known celebrities who are now almost legendary. My mother, for instance, well remembered Samuel Rogers, the banker-poet, who had been born as far back as 1763. I still possess a book of his poems—"Italy"—which he gave her as a wedding present.

As a girl she had been present at one or two of his celebrated breakfasts in Cleveland Row, where she had met Count D'Orsay and Tom Moore, the latter a most delightful man she said.

I have often heard her brother, Lord Orford, recounting how, as a child, his nurse had pointed at a gentleman in the street, and said, "Now, when you grow up you can say you have seen Byron!"

Recollections of celebrated people and historic events are generally treasured by those who have them.

Mr. W. C. Cartwright, of Aynho Park, Northamptonshire (who died during the Great War), a highly cultured and most interesting country gentleman with whom I often had the privilege of staying, prided himself upon having known a man who had been

present at the "Fête des Piques" during the French Revolution. He himself had known Cavour and Mazzini, and had been engaged in secret negotiations connected with the unification of Italy.

Though sadly depressed by the Great War, the surviving Victorians did not during its duration foresee how fatal it was to prove in breaking up ancient properties and country estates.

The period just before 1914 had seen many old Manor Houses restored to their pristine splendour.

Elaborate gardens had been laid out at great cost, and enormous sums expended upon turning tumble-down country houses into artistic and comfortable residences.

Little did anyone dream that before ten years should have elapsed a large proportion of these luxurious abodes would have to find their way into the market, grass and weeds grow up to their very doors, and a number of stately and historic mansions be put up for sale without anyone offering to bid!

For years before the Great War, however, the pomp and state which had once been the appanage of the English aristocracy had waned, while the prestige of the ruling class had been gradually fading away.

Nevertheless, though such political power as it possessed had for years been visibly weakening, up to the nineties Mayfair still retained a good deal of political influence which could be exercised when occasion arose.

The death of a number of the old school in the eighties was a serious loss to the class the privileges of which they had efficiently defended, while those who succeeded them, being cast in a less robust mould, were at best only able to swim with the rising tide of democracy instead of stemming it as their predecessors had generally been able to do.

A good reason for this, which has hitherto escaped notice, was that the new men had not received the education given to their predecessors in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, while having been brought up in a more pampered fashion.

The old English of the well-to-do class, while outwardly at least making little claim to the possession of culture, took care that their children should learn the subjects then considered essential in a thorough manner—the Classics, for instance, were inculcated in an effective way, and boys from the great public schools could usually read Horace and Virgil with ease.

There was then little pampering of small boys, all sorts of queer ideas prevailing as to the beneficent effects of Spartan methods as regards youth. Such a state of affairs of course was apt to press heavily upon sensitive or delicate natures, but with all its faults it undoubtedly developed self-reliance and pluck.

In the eighteenth century the great public schools contained a number of mere children. At that time, indeed, boys went to school very young, and even eighty or ninety years ago nine was quite an ordinary age for them to go to Eton, Westminster, or Harrow. A number practically grew up at school, remaining there for nearly ten years. On the other hand, many went into the army almost boys—in the Peninsula and at Waterloo there were quite a number of sub-alterns of sixteen or seventeen—who seem to have carried out their duties in an efficient manner. In those days by the time a youth had attained the age of twenty he was generally fairly skilled in worldly knowledge.

After the accession of Queen Victoria new ideas as to the education of youth began to prevail, and among

other reforms the school age was gradually extended up to twelve and even fourteen. It was on account of this that Lower School at Eton was abolished about 1868.

The boys of a subsequent generation, who went to school late and stayed there till early manhood, besides having been trained in a far softer manner, were of altogether different mentality and less fitted to go through the world "sword in hand," which, after all, is the only way that any class can hold its own. The men born before 1820 were certainly rougher and more robust than those who came into the world after that date.

A considerable though secret influence of a weakening kind was also exercised by the increase of life in towns, the children brought up in the latter not having the same vitality as those reared in the country, from which every race draws its finest fighting men.

The grandfathers of the present generation had a far rougher time at school than falls to the lot of the modern boy. For the most part they had been sternly taught obedience, and not coddled or pampered with luxuries. Games did not monopolize their time to anything like the extent which is the case to-day. On the whole their good influence has probably been exaggerated, too much time having been devoted to them in recent years. It must always be remembered, when people extol athletics, that it is only the boy who is an adept who gains any real benefit from devoting all his energies to cricket or football.

The majority of schoolboys who are not good at games merely play in a perfunctory fashion, getting them over as idlers do their schoolwork. The physical development of an ordinary boy of this sort is not in any appreciable degree improved by trotting about behind a cluster of his more active schoolmates kicking

a football. Physical drill, on the other hand, produces a marked improvement in the physique of even the feeblest lad. There is no comparison, it is said, between the condition of a body of young men trained in this way and that of others who merely play games.

The old-fashioned Englishman of the upper class, while not pampered at school, led a pretty rough life during his boyhood. Consequently he was self-reliant, ready to deal with most emergencies, and altogether well able to take care of himself.

His successor who went to school in the sixties was brought up in an entirely different way, with the result that when he reached man's estate he was more apologetic than militant, while prone to think that the best way out of awkward situations was to be found in conciliation.

This no doubt was one of the reasons why certain members of the aristocracy openly admitted that the days of its power had gone.

Lord Ribblesdale, in one of the debates preceding the voting on the Parliament Bill, once said that the country now no longer cared for Peers except to open bazaars and act as masters of hounds.

At a period when the aristocracy go about apologizing for their existence it is difficult to realize how arrogant some of them once were.

An American, having been introduced to a pompous and irascible old Peer, said, "I'm real pleased to meet you."

"I should damned well think you ought to be," retorted the old gentleman.

On the whole the aristocracy, both of the old and new schools, behaved extremely well during the Great War, though a certain number of its members who through age or incapacity were obliged to remain at home developed Puritanical tendencies which would

have astounded their predecessors of an earlier period.

All classes, however, seemed to have lost their heads at the idea of an era of universal happiness to be produced by the introduction of various hastily considered restrictions.

According to that emotional ecclesiastic, the Bishop of London, the New England was to be principally conspicuous for its heightened moral tone. It is likely indeed that if this ecclesiastic were to be entrusted with the remodelling of our ways, "gay dogs" would be treated with a fierceness unequalled since the time when the priesthood possessed and ruthlessly exercised complete powers of domination.

Quick to seize the propitious moment, the Puritans demanded the creation of an austere female police, lynx-eyed members of which were to keep a strict look-out to prevent any undue familiarity of speech or look between the sexes.

It was strange that no one thought of raising a subscription in order to defray the cost of that cruelly maligned champion of Social Reform, "Paul Pry!"

The Bishop of London, needless to say, has always been enthusiastically in favour of maintaining every kind of restriction on the sale of alcoholic drinks, his views in this matter being shared by a number of others who are unable to understand why every one is not content with such refreshment as can be obtained from their own cellars. To many whose lives are cast in pleasant and comfortable places the desire to obtain drinks in public-houses seems almost a crime.

The following paragraph, culled from the columns of a popular illustrated "Daily," gives a good idea of how people were carried off their feet by Puritanism during the war:

"I hope after the war no return will be made to the

old hours for the sale of liquor," said a well-known Peer at a public meeting.

It is easily to be understood that the retention of the curtailed facilities for obtaining alcoholic drinks was not likely to cause the nobleman in question the slightest inconvenience, but those in a less fortunate position could scarcely be expected enthusiastically to endorse his views!

As for the music halls, the abolition of the lounges was warmly welcomed by a great proportion of the Press.

It was not only the "Night Life," however, which was to undergo a radical change; even in our sports the social reformer saw his chance of being at our elbow.

The demand of the future, said another Peer to a large assemblage, is to be for "clean sport."

"First of all (I quote from his speech at the Albert Hall, Leeds) betting should stop. Why should anyone spoil a good game or pastime by fleecing a friend or taking money from a bookmaker?"

His lordship must have been a very lucky man or else he forgot that, without backers, no bookmaker could make a living at all. Presumably, however, there was to be no place for either backer or bookmaker in his imaginary Utopia.

Seriously, however, why should it be perpetually necessary to recall Macaulay's immortal dictum as to our national idiosyncrasy of making ourselves ridiculous by indulging in fits of moral indignation?

Would that we would take a lesson from our gallant allies, the clever French. With them during the war there was never any talk of re-establishing the censorship of plays which the Republic swept aside, or cant about the purification of Paris.

The great personal liberty enjoyed by that vivacious

nation has without doubt added something to the already overflowing love of the Frenchman for his native soil.

Though the sale of absinthe (which in truth is but a noxious drug) has been prohibited, no one has sought to restrict the consumption of the red wine which sparkles in the citizen's glass, and no proposal to deprive him of it would have the faintest chance of success. Noting this, let us also remember the words of a clever Victorian Bishop, who, to his eternal credit, dared publicly to say "that he would rather see England free than sober." After all the sacrifices which this country has made, it is a sorry spectacle to see her suffering from a new and insidious form of that Prussianism which this country so successfully set out to destroy.

Social Reform, which is too often but a euphemism for poking the nose into other people's affairs, has indeed become a sort of recognized pastime for people with a little money and plenty of spare time—priggish men and middle-aged spinsters being always sure of attracting notice in the Press, provided the measures which they advocate are sufficiently drastic and absurd.

While a great deal is said and written about the beneficent influence of strong-minded females in modern life, no one seems to realize the complete disappearance of the fine type of patrician English-woman who in the past was often consulted by politicians and leaders of men.

Great knowledge of the world, combined with sound judgment and a tolerant view of human nature, were the characteristics of a number of these ladies who lived in the West End.

A typical example was the late Lady Cork, who died in 1912—one of the last of the great ladies of the Victorian Era. For many years before her death ill-

health obliged her to pass the day on a couch, but she never lacked visitors. Every one who enjoyed the privilege of her friendship was only too pleased to go and hear her shrewd aphorisms and comments on social life, for in spite of her infirmity she contrived to keep wonderfully in touch with the times.

A great authority upon the past, she was the only person alive who could give any definite information as to the 5th Duke of Portland, a recluse, of whom in her girlhood she had seen a good deal.

At the time of the Druce case Lady Cork never ceased protesting against the truth of the story which was finally quashed by Mr. Druce's exhumation.

Speaking of the various legends circulated about the Duke's eccentricities, she once told me that the underground galleries, which he was supposed to have made in order that he might walk in them unperceived by human eyes, came into existence from quite a different reason.

"The Duke," said she, "was a most conscientious man and very intent upon leaving Welbeck in an improved condition for his heir."

Originally his idea was to build above ground, but because this would involve the destruction of a number of fine trees, he decided to make the improvements he contemplated beneath the soil, the aspect of the grounds surrounding the house being thus left untouched.

I inquired whether any part of the rumours as to the Duke having led a double life contained a scintilla of truth.

"Human folly," she replied, "cannot be reckoned any more than one can count the sands of the sea. Believe me, the whole of this ridiculous story is based upon nothing at all—such fabrications are too preposterous for discussion."

A strange thing was that the obituary notices of this exceptionally clever lady's death made little or no mention of her high intellectual gifts and the great part she had played in London Society.

Her reminiscences, had she cared to write them, would have been of absorbing interest. Unfortunately her literary efforts were limited to a couple or so of magazine articles, but she furnished some valuable material to one or two of her friends.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century practically all the characters of the Victorian Era had disappeared.

One of the most original of these had been Lord Brougham, who actually sought to represent Cannes in the French National Assembly of 1848.

Offering himself as a candidate for the representation of the Department of the Var, the inhabitants at one time seemed disposed to support him.

Setting out for Paris, he addressed a letter to a minister of justice requesting an act of naturalization. The minister in reply apprised him of the consequences of the demand. "If France adopts you for one of her sons, you cease to be an Englishman; you are no longer Lord Brougham, you become Citizen Brougham. You lose forthwith all titles of nobility, all privileges, all advantages, of whatever nature they may be, which you possess, either in your quality of Englishman, or by virtue of rights hitherto conferred on you by British laws or customs, and which cannot harmonize with our laws of equality between all citizens."

This did not at all suit Lord Brougham, who preferred his peerage to a very visionary chance of the French Presidency.

The Peer in question lived at No. 4 Grafton Street, in 1830, which was the year he was made Lord Chancellor and raised to the peerage under the title of Lord Brougham and Vaux.

The mansion, the interior of which had many fine features, has long ceased to be used as a private house. The "Isthmian" Club was located there in the eighties, and it was afterwards occupied by the "New Club"; within recent years, however, like so many other fine old buildings in the West End, it has become utilized for commercial purposes.

In the eighties died Lord Houghton, a well-known social figure and verse writer, who was known to Society as "the Cool of the Evening." As a political speaker this clever Peer is said to have greatly improved when he found himself opposed to his old leader, Mr. Gladstone.

"Ah," said the latter, alluding to Lord Houghton's oratorical attacks upon the Home Rule Bill, "he never spoke like this when he was speaking for his own side."

No man had a better knowledge of Society than this gifted nobleman, but latterly he seemed to have become rather tired of it.

"The most pleasant thing of all," said he, "is to be asked everywhere and go nowhere!"

Like many of the older Victorians he much disliked music at parties. "Hang the music," one old statesman would say in a resonant voice when subjected to this form of social annoyance.

A typical aristocrat of a different kind was the fourth Lord Rosslyn, a nobleman with a very distinguished appearance, who had a keen eye for a good horse and knew exactly where to get the best of everything. It was said that if you wanted a cook, horse, house, or secretary, Lord Rosslyn would produce any of them in the shortest possible time.

A good judge of most things, he had a wide knowledge of the world, in addition to which he was a poet and the father of some singularly beautiful daughters.

Lord Rosslyn was an astute man, clever at managing his property, but a number of his contemporaries were just the opposite. Such a one was the luxurious nobleman who, when his affairs had become hopelessly involved and ruin was staring him in the face, blandly continued to be as extravagant as ever.

"My dear fellow," said an old friend, "I hope you won't mind my saying so, but it surely can't be necessary for you to keep an Italian pastry cook as well as a French *chef*?"

"Damme, sir," was the reply, "things have come to a pretty pass when a man mayn't have a biscuit with his glass of sherry!"

Another of this class who, though simple in his tastes, liked state even when alone never sat down to eat a solitary cutlet without three servants in livery and two out, standing around the table.

A number of great landowners and Peers had a habit of bewailing their poverty, but they did not live any the less luxuriously for all that. The first Lord Tollemache, for instance, having sustained serious losses owing to the cattle plague which played such havoc in Cheshire in the sixties, declared that he ought to sell his house in London and take lodgings in some slum, but he did nothing of the sort, and died with a mansion in St. James's Square, two large country houses, and a team of perfectly matched chestnuts which was the envy of the coaching world.

As a general rule the groans of the aristocracy in those days were not based upon any real foundation of poverty as they are to-day.